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The Devil in the Details

Not Deer, or a Deer?

Autumn Sword

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The Appalachian region of the United States is allegedly home to several well-know Appalachian Chupacabra, the Pennsylvanian White Bigfoot, and many others. To tha sightings of what's referred to as the "Not Deer." Although websites such as 4chan, alleged Not Deer sightings, it's on the video-sharing social media platform TikTok wh the hashtag #notdeer currently at 34.8 million views.

Unlike other cryptids, the Not Deer is characterized not as a distinctly unknown ani *contrast* to a known animal—a deer (Cervidae). Not Deer are variously described as l something "wrong" with them, such as having the forward-facing eyes of a predator together, a neck that's too long, a head that's misshapen, or legs that are judged to b unnatural ways. Alleged sightings of Not Deer have been reported mostly within Pe with some reported sightings as far away as Texas and Norway.

Despite millions of views associated with the hashtag #notdeer, there are few video either users sharing *stories* about Not Deer or duetting with the few videos that are photographic evidence on either Reddit or Tumblr of alleged Not Deer, though of co the absence of such evidence, a serious scientific investigation is still possible.

On the Trail of the Not Deer

After an hour of searching through every result for #NotDeer on TikTok, filtering thc upload date for each video (apparently TikTok doesn't have the functionality to allov newest), the oldest video I could find was from the user @ohthatsfantastic dated M: knows of an older video, please contact me.)

In the video, the user relates that "I was out at my grandparent's house here [no indi around the woods like the cryptid I am, when a few yards ahead of me I see a doe. N seen does out here before and I just want to take a minute to look at her, don't wan me in the eyes. I notice that all of her knees are bent backwards. Any direction a dee

I reached out to @ohthatsfantastic for clarification on where exactly this sighting oc the deer's knees being bent "backwards" (as deer don't actually have knees), howeve of any corroborating evidence, this is merely an anecdote; interesting, but not much

One of the most popular TikTok videos of Not Deer, with 1.9M views and 422.8K likes, was uploaded by @donnabhaln (real name Donovan) on July 7, 2021, and does in fact contain a sighting of … something. What's interesting about this video is Donovan sounds perfectly calm in the video, refers to the animal as a "deer" instead of a Not Deer, and even laughs as it stands there facing him. I asked Donovan whether he believed what he saw and filmed was a Not Deer, and he replied "It's just a deer, the reserve it's on is home to various deer with deformities and injuries. Not frightened cause I see deer often just never out in the open like that. Many hide due to past trauma with hunters/traffickers" (Donovan 2021).

Although Not Deer are most popular on TikTok, my hunch was that the idea didn't s Not Deer, I knew I had to look elsewhere. At first, it seemed as though Not Deer rea instance, the subReddit r/notdeer was only created in February 2021. However, I so history. For example, under r/notdeer there's a crosspost from another subReddit, r/ creepygreentexts was made by redditor u/carld135 in 2019, titled "Anon Goes Hikir much older, dated September 25, 2014. In the post, the anon claimed to have been they noticed "something moving across the field not more than 30 yards away." The

thing with pointed ears and an elongated snout crossing my path on all fours while r
trying to learn how to walk immediately after having been born. Only it doesn't look
of one. And it's fucking enormous."

The description of what the anon claims to have seen seems to match most descript
never referred to it as such. So far as I can tell, the first mention of the Not Deer by
by Tumblr user Will-o-the-Witch (real name Madison) on her page, Have a Magical D
mean That's Not A Deer in the mountains near you?" to which Madison replied "Any
Appalachia knows the Not Deer" and goes on to describe it: "more or less what I'd c
about it. They're all somewhat similar. You're in a car at night, in a rural, heavily woo
wildly uncommon to see a opossum crossing the road, see blips of little animals with
friends go 'Oh! Deer!' and slow down in case it leaps in front of you. Then you see it
about it. There's something about its eyes. You feel your stomach get heavy like a ro
intelligence that you shouldn't. It doesn't move like a deer, it moves like a ... oh god,
not a deer and *we need to leave*. You hit the gas and get the hell out of there."

A redditor named u/justme357 read Madison's page and in 2019, under the subRed
Stories" asking "Hey guys so I don't know a lot or really anything about Appalachia, I
about an Appalachian cryptid or local folklore about deer that people see that are W
Darth-Skvader replied: "Hey there! This is actually my post. It's cool seeing how it's a
its rounds outside of Tumblr, which I never expected. I'll admit the 'anyone in Appala
story and setting the scene than me really expecting everyone to know it. That said,
with, there definitely ARE a lot of stories about the Not Deer that people will recogn
thing.' I don't live there anymore, but I used to live in NC and most of my stories abo
surrounding Boone ... Ultimately, though, my main goal was to share the story of a lo
good cryptid story should have."

Several TikTok videos refer to the story of Not Deer originating from North Carolina
fail to credit Madison's Tumblr post. In my correspondence with Madison, she reitera
Carolina until recently, so largely the southern Appalachian Mountain area. The wor
least in my circles of folk (who tend to be very open minded to the spiritual and thin
exactly what I was talking about even if they'd never heard it called the Not Deer be
of the Not Deer; it's always been a synthesis of other people's testimonies from the
contribution was just giving a name to an idea that's already existed for a while" (Ma

This is a more modest claim suggesting that far from being a local legend or part of
Deer was something believed in by a small group of people native to the region of B
about it online at which time it began to take on a life of its own. I reached out to se

about it online at which time it began to take on a life of its own. I reached out to se
verify if something similar to Not Deer existed in any local folklore. Stephen Gencar
University of Massachusetts Amherst (he lives in Lyme, Connecticut) responded to r
popular in Connecticut right now, at least not so that I can find it in recorded places
term comes from Appalachia, so it's entirely possible that the name has penetrated
small folk groups (say, hunters or teenagers) and will become more popular over tim
the name of that cryptid is not yet popular in contemporary Connecticut lore" (Genc

Likewise, Russ Miller, the director of Meigs Point Nature Center (who cohosts a radi
the intersection of science and folklore in the region) confirmed he had not heard th
Connecticut. Gencarella's hypothesis that the term *Not Deer* is being shared by smal
that the concept originated with Madison and her circle of friends and acquaintance
over the past several years, reports of strange deer have been on the rise in Connec
outbreaks of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD). "If I were a betting man, my gue
breakout in Connecticut, it will create the perfect ground for storytelling about 'Not

Perhaps not coincidentally back in 2019, the same year Madison's Tumblr post went
Boone is located) were dying of EHD. Furthermore, according to biologists, outbreal
years. Such conditions could create the perfect opportunity for repeated sightings o
supports the hypothesis that Not Deer stories are likely both misidentification of de
entertainment.

White People and Native American 'Magic'

The characterization of Not Deer as something trying to imitate a deer has led some
creatures from Native American belief systems, with comments such as "Could be a
Great Lake regions" and "Sounds like a Skinwalker." I fail to see a connection betwee
evil spirit characterized by its insatiable hunger for human flesh, described as "gaunt
skin pulled tightly over its bones. With its bones pushing out against its skin, its com
pushed back deep into their sockets" (Johnston 2001). Neither shape-shifting nor de
with Wendigo folklore.

The possible relationship between Skinwalkers and the Not Deer is more obvious. A
Skinwalkers, or *yee naaldlooshii*, (meaning "with it, he goes on all fours") were practit
shifting. I reached out to Noah Nez, fellow writer for *Skeptical Inquirer* who maintain
about Skinwalkers and how they may or may not be related to Not Deer. Nez explai
Like Chupacabra, it often gets called anything shape-shifting. However, depending o
certain forms. I have never heard of an animal-human mix that Not Deer sighting ha

there isn't a chance ... but there aren't many stories that involve a hybrid, chimera th Skinwalkers isn't their appearance; it is the dark magic they use. We are not even su related, but happens to be a similar concept of seeing a deer in the wild under stran

In Native American folklore, creatures such as the Wendigo and the Skinwalker are values. Stories of Wendigos and Skinwalkers act as cautionary tales. By relating thes Deer, a cryptid and contemporary urban legend, people not only fail to respect and meaning these creatures have within their specific traditions, they also demonstrate that meaning.

D'oh! A Deer

It would be easy to dismiss Not Deer as merely a story (similar to the Dibbuk box), h different regions of the United States (and in some cases other countries) reporting least some people really are claiming to have seen something; however, without har anecdotal. That's not to say that they shouldn't be taken seriously or should be dism much for the serious investigator to go on. It can't be discounted that some people entertainment purposes or for trolling the credulous; however, if we grant that at le they can't explain, what plausible explanations might there be?

As previously mentioned, d reported Not Deer sighting Wasting Disease (CWD) ma stumbling, listlessness and "decreased interactions wit head, blank facial expressio set patterns. Excessive saliv are observed." This perfectl Deer behavior: "I noticed th seemingly frozen in time lik out into nothing." Epizootic similar symptoms such as " lameness, and swelling of th appetite and no fear of hum reasonably account for the unreasonable to suppose th diseases such as CWD and EHD are and how they present in animals such as deer, abnormal-looking deer behaving in ways they can't explain might adopt a supernatu

abnormal-looking deer behaving in ways they can't explain might adopt a supernatu

Zootic diseases and reported sightings of Not Deer, by themselves, are not sufficien Indeed, most of the TikTok videos under #notdeer are not first-hand accounts of alle duetting TikTok videos of Not Deer to share their own personal stories, but rather b are real is good plain fun. As American folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand put it, "The la appeal that urban legends have for us. We enjoy them merely as stories, and tend t accurate reports." Until compelling forensic evidence emerges in support of the exis explanation is that they are a misidentification of ordinary, albeit sick, deer. Neverth campfire story for the digital age.

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Autumn Sword

Autumn Sword is an investigator, host of the po member of the Church of Satan.